

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, MANAYUNK BRANCH
Fleming and Dupont Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6758
PA-6758

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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HABS NO. PA-6758

- Location: The Manayunk Branch is located on Fleming Street at Green Lane, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. It is dramatically sited at the top of a steep grade, facing south and overlooking the town of Manayunk.
- Owner: Now under private ownership.
- Present Use: The Manayunk Branch, de-accessioned from Free Library system, was last used as a home for the elderly; it is undergoing rehabilitation as condominium units.
- Significance: Completed in 1908, the Manayunk Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia was the tenth of twenty-five branch libraries built through an endowment from industrialist-turned-philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The impact of Carnegie's grant program on the development of public libraries cannot be overstated. He came of age in an era when libraries were rare, privately funded institutions and access was through subscription. Believing in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege by allowing equal access to knowledge, between 1886 and 1917 he provided forty million dollars for the construction of 1,679 libraries throughout the nation. The vast resources that Carnegie allotted to library research and construction contributed significantly to the development of the American Library as a building type. In addition, by insisting that municipalities contribute a building site, books, and annual maintenance funds before bestowing grants, Carnegie elevated libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility.

Philadelphia was the recipient of one of the largest of Carnegie's library grants. Although the city was among the first to establish a free library system, it had no purpose-built structures prior to the endowment. The branch libraries were built between 1905 and 1930, under the direction of the city appointed Carnegie Fund Committee, and designed by a "who's-who" of Philadelphia's architects. The twenty extant branch libraries remain as a remarkable intact and cohesive grouping, rivaled only by that of New York City, with fifty-seven.¹ Manayunk Branch was designed by architect Benjamin Rush Stevens in the Beaux Arts styling and symmetrical T-plan that came to define Carnegie Libraries in Philadelphia as well as nationwide. However, its fine details, massing, and scale make it one of the more elaborate of the Philadelphia branches.

¹ Carnegie provided funding for thirty branches, but only twenty-five were built. Four are gone and a fifth (Frankford) has been drastically altered. Four others are no longer used as libraries (Germantown, Manayunk, Southwark, and South Philadelphia). In New York, fifty-seven were still standing, and fifty-four still operating as libraries as of 1996. The next largest groupings are Cleveland (15), Baltimore (14), and Cincinnati (10).

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Manayunk Branch was built between 1906 and 1908, and opened in February 1909. The donation of the lot to the city was reported in October 1905, and the architect was appointed a month later. By May 1906, an invitation for construction bids was let. After some debate about whether or not to attempt to reduce costs (presumably by making changes to the design and/or selection of materials), the construction contract was awarded in July of that year. The cornerstone for the building was laid on 28 November 1906. It was completed in 1908, and opened early in 1909 after final inspection and approval by the city council. Manayunk was one of three branches completed within the same timeframe, the other two being nearby Wissahickon (no longer extant) and Chestnut Hill.²

2. Architect: The library was designed by Philadelphia architect Benjamin Rush Stevens, who practiced architecture in the city from 1903 until 1935. Stevens began his career working in the well-known Philadelphia firm of George W. Hewitt & William D. Hewitt. Hewitt & Hewitt are responsible for the design of the Lehigh Branch; one of the first of the Free Library branches to be completed (in 1905). Thus Stevens had exposure to the Carnegie library project prior to receiving his own commission. Stevens' work included residential as well as commercial and institutional designs. The latter type encompassed banks, churches, schools, hospitals, a YMCA and a Masonic Lodge. Stevens became a member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1907.

Benjamin Rush Stevens was appointed architect for the Manayunk Branch in November 1905.³ The Committee most likely became acquainted with Stevens while he was employed at Hewitt & Hewitt; along with a fellow junior partner, Stevens was tasked with the development of a potential prototype for the design of Philadelphia's branch libraries in 1904, on the eve of their conception. According to the records of the Carnegie Fund Committee,

Mr. Edmunds reported that he had obtained from Messrs. Stevens and Edmunds, who are both employed in the office of Messrs. Hewitt, a plan showing what kind of building could, in their judgment, be erected for \$30,000, the building to measure 60' x 40 and to be about 45' in height.⁴

This exercise was highly significant in that it indicates that the Carnegie Committee sought to develop a standard design, or at least some general specifications to convey to the architects that they hired. The latter appears more to be the case, as the only building that meets the qualification, at least in terms of general size, was the Thomas Holmes Branch design by Horace Castor shortly thereafter. Clearly Stevens strayed from this

² Free Library of Philadelphia, *Annual Report, 1908* (January 1909).

³ Ibid, 10 November 1905.

⁴ *Annual Report, 1904*, 14 July 1904.

early prototype in creating his own design for the Manayunk Library, which was clear more elaborate and costly than the Committee had originally anticipated; although the bid for the construction of this finely detailed building came in at \$45,000, it was under the amount allotted by the Carnegie grant. It would appear, however, that Stevens was awarded the contract for the design of the Manayunk Branch while still under the employ of Hewitt & Hewitt, as his appointment was recorded 10 November 1905.⁵ By 1909, Stevens is listed as an independent architect, suggesting that his first known independent work was the design of the Manayunk Library.

3. Owners: The building was originally part of the Free Library of Philadelphia system and was owned by the city of Philadelphia. It was later de-accessioned and sold to a private owner and rehabilitated for use as a home for senior citizens. At the time of the survey, the building was empty and work was only just beginning to convert it for use as condominium apartments.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The construction contract was awarded to the firm of Metzger & Wells, Charles S. Metzger and James Wells, principals, for \$45,000 and recorded in the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee on 24 July 1906. At the same time, the heating contract was awarded to P. Gormly and the lighting to J.T. Buchanan. The base of operations for contractor Metzger & Wells was in Philadelphia, although the company undertook construction jobs statewide. They worked with many of the most notable architects of the times and were considered among the most successful contractors in the Philadelphia area. The partnership lasted from about 1903 until 1914; the successor firm of Metzger & Wells, Fisher & While, operated until 1931 at which point it operated as Metzger & Company.⁶

5. Original plans and construction: Photographs produced by William H. Rau upon completion of the building, as required by the Carnegie Corporation, provide a decent portrayal of the original state of both the library's exterior and interior. Most of the exterior features are still intact, with the notable exception of changes to the windows (described below). The interior originally appeared as a large open-space reading room with a secondary reading room or reference section to the rear to form a T-shaped configuration. The two were joined by a large opening with shouldered surrounds that raised full height to the cornice and included folding wood-panel doors, likely to facilitate the room's dual use as a lecture hall. This notion is further supported by the standard-size doorways that flank this opening; these doors would have enabled access to and from the lecture hall when the folding doors were closed. The main reading room was divided into sections by low shelving and a circulation desk was located to the front and center, near the main entry. Built-in wood shelving lined the walls on all sides. The dark woodwork was left unpainted. There was a heavy ornamental cornice and a skylight in both the main and rear reading rooms. Brass chandeliers with glass globes hung from the ceilings and globed sconces were mounted on the shelving. The circulation desk

⁵ Ibid., 10 November 1904.

⁶ *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, as cited in "Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project" of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, www.philadelphiabuildings.org.

provided a central work area for librarians where they were also afforded a clear view of the entire space.

6. Alterations and additions: The most notable exterior change is the regrettable alteration of the windows. They originally consisted of a single large opening that included a fixed arrangement of three-by-nine lights, around which appeared side-, corner-, and over-lights. Likewise, the former double doors with transom were replaced by a single door with a panel to the side and above. While the interior was not accessible, it appears that the changes were made to the windows to allow for the division of the interior space horizontally into two levels. This resulted in the inclusion of a plain spandrel through the center of the former opening (where the new floor is located) and the installation of new windows above and below. The original window surrounds, however, remain intact. The extent of the interior changes is not known though it appears to have been partitioned into multiple rooms. It is highly likely that little of the interior arrangement or the fittings survive.

B. Historical Context:

The Carnegie Funded Free Library of Philadelphia Building Campaign

On 3 January 1903, Carnegie's secretary James Bertram responded to the Free Library of Philadelphia's request for a grant to finance the construction of libraries with the promise of \$1.5 million for a planned thirty branch libraries. Despite the fact that Philadelphia figures quite prominently on the timeline of American Library history, it had no purpose-built public libraries prior to the Carnegie endowment. Philadelphia *did* have the nation's first private subscription library, known as the Library Company, founded in 1731. Numerous other private libraries were created as well, such as the Mercantile Library, Ridgeway Library, and the library at the University of Pennsylvania. And it was in Philadelphia that the American Library Association was formed in 1876. The establishment of the Free Library in 1891 placed Philadelphia among the first American cities to institute a non-subscription public library system for the benefit of all of Philadelphia's citizens. As Library Board president J.G. Rosengarten stated in 1903, "Proprietary libraries have grown into valuable adjuncts to our other education institutions. None of them, however, serves the public as does the Free Library, providing good reading for our school children, for our industrious adult population, and for the city's useful employees, firemen, and telegraph operators."⁷ As Rosengarten's comment indicates, the library system was an important component of the city's public education.

However, prior to the Carnegie funding, the city's fourteen branch libraries, each started by interested local communities, were dependent upon old mansions, storefronts, or back rooms of commercial buildings and civic institutions for library space. As Rosengarten points out, "The [Carnegie] gift gave welcome relief from the expense of the rented rooms occupied by the branches, and from much of the risk to which the collections were subjected in these temporary quarters."⁸ Likewise, prior to the completion of its permanent home in 1927, the Central Branch

⁷ Theodore Wesley Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 85.

⁸ Ibid.

of the Free Library was housed within three different preexisting buildings, including City Hall, an abandoned concert hall on Chestnut Street, and a building at the northeast corner of 13th and Locust streets. Carnegie's \$1.5 million grant would change all that. Beginning in 1905, the endowment was used for the design and construction of twenty-five branch libraries throughout the city (three of which are no longer extant). They were built between 1905 and 1930, with the bulk of them constructed by 1917, and designed by a wide range of Philadelphia architects.

Philadelphia was just one of many cities to receive a library grant. Andrew Carnegie provided forty million dollars for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and about 400 more abroad). Carnegie was motivated by both his own immigrant experience and by his social/political beliefs. Despite his poor, working-class upbringing, he made a fortune through the production of steel. Believing that the wealthy were obligated to give back to society, Carnegie set out to spend during his lifetime the entire 400 million dollars that he received through the sale of Carnegie Steel Company. Carnegie also believed that given a good work ethic and the proper tools, anyone could be successful. He was self-taught and credited his success to the access he received to one gentleman's private library. Carnegie came to believe in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege. Hence libraries, as a key to learning and socialization, became a focus of his charitable donations.

While Carnegie's motivations were in large part paternalistic, the impact of his library campaign is far greater than merely providing the working class with access to books. The vast resources that he applied to this area led to great advances in library science as well as to the development of the American Library as a building type. Carnegie applied the corporate business models that had made him successful as an industrialist to the development and production of libraries. He insured that local municipalities had a stake in their libraries by insisting that they supply the building site and the books, as well as ten percent of the total construction cost annually for maintenance. By so doing, Carnegie took libraries from the arena of private philanthropy to that of civic responsibility. Any town that was willing to meet those terms was basically able to receive grant funding. The process began via a letter of application submitted to Andrew Carnegie's personal secretary and the individual charged with management of the library grants, James Bertram. In 1903, the city of Philadelphia did just that.

Unlike its rival New York City, Philadelphia's planning group, the Carnegie Fund Committee, placed librarians and not architects at the forefront of the planning process. This is likely the primary reason for the relative standardization of Philadelphia's branch libraries, particularly with regard to layout. This important decision on the part of the Library Board was in keeping with the sentiments endorsed by the Carnegie Corporation. James Bertram was generally distrustful of architects as library planners, believing that they tended to make libraries too expensive by adding unusable space and superfluous detail merely for affect. He preferred the advice of librarians who better understood how libraries needed to function. Both the Philadelphia Library Board and Carnegie Fund Committee included well-placed librarians, the former being Pennsylvania State Librarian and American Library Association representative Thomas L. Montgomery, and the latter, the librarian for the Free Library, John Thomson. President of the Board of Education Henry R. Edmunds was also on the Committee, an indication of the significance of the libraries to public education in Philadelphia. Prominent local

businessmen and attorneys filled the other positions. As the Committee minutes indicate, the Librarian and Assistant Librarian were left to work out the details with the architects, and generally had the last say when it came to finalizing the plans.⁹ (For more information about the Carnegie Library construction program and the Free Library of Philadelphia's own library building campaign see, Free Library of Philadelphia, Central Branch, HABS No. PA-6749, Historical Context section.)

The Manayunk Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia

The Manayunk Branch was the tenth of twenty-five branch libraries built with funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation. As with many of the branches, a site was donated by a local citizen to enable the establishment of a library. The "impressive" site (measuring 100' x 137') was offered by John F. S. Morris, as recorded by the Carnegie Fund Committee minutes in September 1905. The site is dramatically situated at the top of steep rise, so rugged that borings were taken prior to its acceptance to ensure that it would not be necessary to blast through rock to dig the foundation. The site was deemed acceptable on 26 October. The hilly site, which remains the most dramatic of any of the Philadelphia Branch libraries, is indicative of this area of the city along the Schuylkill River.¹⁰ Green Lane, which runs to the front of the library, forms one of the main thoroughfares running perpendicular to the main street and riverfront area of Manayunk, near the northern end of town.

By May 1906 the plans were sufficiently completed and a request for construction bids was let. There appears to have been some debate over the architectural details and siting as presented by architect Stevens, motivated by concerns over cost. Recorded in the minutes of the Carnegie Fund Committee was the decision that "Mr. Stevens be not authorized to take away the pillars and portico in an attempt to reduce the expense of the building." Much of the excessive cost was likely attributable to the difficulties posed by the steep site, as the minutes state that it "will be better not to complicate the cost of the building itself with that of the grading of walks."¹¹ Providing access to the library necessitated the construction of high stone retaining walls and an elaborate steam-boat-style stairway, with steps ascending from either side to a landing and proceeding upward from Fleming Street to the front entry.

The contractor was the well-respected firm of Metzger & Wells who reportedly worked with many of the best architects in the city (although it appears that this was the only library building for which they were responsible). The contractor presented two separate bids, one using "artificial stone," presumably for the details, and the other in a cheaper terra cotta. The latter material was selected and the building was constructed of buff-colored brick with terra cotta details to include window and doorway surrounds and portico columns. Excavation must have

⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1 July 1904. "On motion resolved, that the matter of procuring plans and securing bids be referred to the Carnegie Fund Committee with power." And also, Carnegie Fund Committee Minutes, 17 May 1912. An entry from this meeting (one of many) illustrates that practices: "Mr. Richards [architect] be instructed to prepare plans for the proposed new Paschalville Branch and that the President be authorized to approve plans for such Branch when same were agreed upon by himself, the Librarian, Asst. Librarian and the architect."

¹⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minute Book, 13 October 1905.

¹¹ Ibid., 16 June 1906.

begun soon after the contract was signed in July 1906, for the laying of the cornerstone was reported on 16 November. The contract for Manayunk was let just prior to the opening of the first four of what would eventually total twenty-five branch libraries (the West Philadelphia, Lehigh, Frankford and Tacony branches) and thus represented the beginning of a second round of library construction. Concurrent with Manayunk was the planning and construction for the Wissahickon, Chestnut Hill, and Spring Garden branches, soon to be followed by that of (Port) Richmond.

The borough of Manayunk was originally known as Flat Rock, named for a peculiar outcropping that lay on the lower side of a bridge that crossed the Schuylkill River at this point. The settlement began with the construction of a dam, canal, and locks by the Schuylkill Navigation Company, completed in 1818. With water-power now available, the company leased power for use in mills and factories. A lease and water rights was sought by Captain John Towers, who erected an oil mill. Soon other mills and factories appeared here and Flat Rock became a manufacturing village. In 1824 the town adopted a resolution changing the name to Manayunk, which is said to be one of the names for the River Schuylkill. The borough of Manayunk was incorporated 11 June 1840. Manayunk continued to be a manufacturing town into the twentieth century. The area is still defined by a main thoroughfare along the river with old mills and commercial buildings fronting it, and workers row housing rising along the steep hillside beyond. As the mills closed the borough became economically depressed. By the latter part of the twentieth century, Manayunk was transformed into a haven for artists and eventually antique shops and boutiques, small restaurants, and a well-known farmers market located here. The old mill building was converted for use as condominiums. The neighborhood has since been “discovered” and trendy chain stores and business have moved in.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Manayunk Branch library was designed in the Beaux Arts style typical of Carnegie Libraries and other civic structures of the period. It is a symmetrically balanced brick and terra structure. Manayunk is an over-scaled three-bay-by-one-bay single story structure on a raised basement with a perpendicular rear ell to form a T-shape configuration. The front façade features an entry pavilion with classical frontispiece, and there is a shallower pavilion to the rear T section featuring a large window above which appears a pediment flanked by chimney stacks. To either side of the front entry pavilion are huge windows that rise from the water table to the roof eaves. These have been greatly altered from the original with only the outermost surround remaining intact. Originally a huge tripartite window filled most of the space, with a large spandrel below. The current arrangement eliminated the original spandrel to create two bands of windows with a plain “spandrel” or panel between them. This was likely done in an attempt to create a two-story space from the original interior (inaccessible).

2. Condition of fabric: The building appears from the exterior to be structurally sound and in good condition, although the interior has been substantially altered and the building has been left vacant.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The library is an over-scaled structure, three bays across by one-bay deep with a rear one-bay-by-one-bay ell to form an overall T-shaped configuration. There is also an entry pavilion to the center of the front façade.

2. Foundations: The foundations are presumably of stone (inaccessible).

3. Walls: The walls are of buff-colored brick in a running bond pattern with terra cotta details including the entry entablature, quoining, columns, and window surrounds.

4. Structural systems, framing: The structural system is of load-bearing masonry (possibly with structural steel supports).

5. Porches, stoops: There is a large entry pavilion to the center of the front façade which is elevated from the ground level and reached by a wide stairway. The frontispiece consists of pairs of fully articulated Ionic columns supporting an entablature with dentil and egg-and-dart molding and foliated banding.

6. Chimneys: The rear ell section is flanked by chimney stacks.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The former double-door main entry has been replaced by a single door with a fixed panel to one side and the transom light has likewise been replaced with a solid panel. The doorway surround is shouldered with bead-and-reel and acanthus leaf molding. Above is an entablature, supported by scroll brackets, that includes a foliated band and dentil molding. Inscribed in the stone work above is "MANAYUNK BRANCH" flanked by carvings of male and female allegorical figures. There is a secondary entrance on the west side of the rear ell near to where it joins with the main block. Like the secondary windows, it is ornamented by a lintel with keystone only. There is also an entry into the rear section, located at the crux of the main block and ell, with a stairway leading to a basement entry beneath it.

b. Windows: The typical window is an oversize arrangement that rises from the water table to the roof eaves with two, side-by-side, one-over-one-light windows in the upper and lower sections, with a plan panel between them. (The original tripartite window consisted of a larger center section of twenty-seven lights flanked by a row of sidelights and the corresponding transom above, two-lights high.) The terra cotta window surrounds consist of a cove molding with a garland laid out in the upper section, around the whole of which is located quoining, with a large keystone in the lintel. A smaller, simpler band of windows appears in the rear elevation of the main block to either side of the T projection. These windows

do not include the surround that appears elsewhere, but has merely a lintel with keystone. Basement windows consisting of nine-light casements each appear in pairs in the water table, located under the principal windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Both the main block and rear ell section have hipped roofs that intersect with each other. There is a flat section to the center to accommodate the skylights. The entry pavilion is topped by a terra-cotta balustrade on three sides, butted against the front slope of the roof.

b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves have a deep overhang with decorative brackets that support it.

C. Description of Interior: The interior was not accessible. However, the new window arrangement suggests that the original single-story space has been altered to create two stories. (See Original Plans and construction for a description of the floor plan as built.)

D. Site: The Manayunk Branch Library is dramatically sited at the top of steep rise overlooking the rooftops of the largely working-class houses that surround it. Beyond the roof tops can be seen the Schuylkill River along which the town or borough of Manayunk is laid out. The hillside is supported by rubble stone retaining walls. There is a break in the center of the wall to accommodate a "steamboat" style stairway; flights of stairs to the east and west meet at a landing and then a single run of stairs proceeds to the front entry of the library. Fleming Street is to the south front of the library, which curves to meet with Green Lane located just below it.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views: Free Library of Philadelphia, Annual Report, 1908 (Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154). Includes photographs taken upon completion of the Manayunk Library, William H. Rau, photographer. One view is a perspective of the south front and east side of the library, and the other is of the interior of the library taken from the main entry, with the circulation desk in the foreground, and the rear T-shaped extension beyond.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources: The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee, Minute Books, 1904, 1905, 1906.

Ibid., *Tenth Annual Report*, 1905.

Ibid., Eleventh Annual Report, 1906.

Ibid., Twelfth Annual Report, 1907.

Ibid., Thirteenth Annual Report, 1908.

2. Secondary sources:

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The documentation of the Manayunk Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott. Measured drawings were prepared of the Thomas Holme Branch as the typical branch library during the summer 2008. The drawings team was led by Robert Arzola, working with Jason McNatt, Paul Davidson, and Ann Kidd, architectural technicians.